

Arbor Foundations

A SOLID BASE TO BUILD UPON

Lesson 25: Community / Unity / Diversity
The Great Commandment



What is Christian Community?



What is Christian Community?

*Christianity means community **through** Jesus Christ and **in** Jesus Christ. No Christian community is more or less than this. Whatever it be a brief, single encounter or the daily fellowship of years, Christian community is only this. We belong to one another only through and in Jesus Christ (Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*, 21)*

Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity! (Psalm 133:1)

Why the Need for Community?

The Christian needs others because of Jesus Christ

- Our worth, salvation, righteousness, sanctification is all found in Christ.

[Christian] fellowship is founded solely upon Jesus Christ and [His] “righteousness”. All we can say, therefore, is: the community of Christians springs solely from the Biblical and Reformation message of justification of man through grace alone; this alone is the basis of the longing of Christians for one another. (Bonhoeffer, 23).

Christian Fellowship as a Means of Perseverance

- **Hebrews 3:12-14** *Take care, brothers, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God. But exhort one another every day, as long as it is called “today,” that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin. For we have come to share in Christ, if indeed we hold our original confidence firm to the end.*

Why the Need for Community?

The Christian comes to Others only through Christ because of His accomplished work.

Ephesians 2:13-16 *But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For he himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility by abolishing the law of commandments expressed in ordinances, that he might create in himself one new man in place of the two, so making peace, and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby killing the hostility.*

Why the Need for Community?

In Jesus Christ we have been chosen from eternity, accepted in time, & united for eternity

- Doctrine of “Union with Christ” | The Church – the Body of Christ | Church Universal (All True Believers)
- *Christian community means community though and in Christ*

How did God Reveal the Purpose of Community and What Does It Look Like?

- **The Tower of Babel** – Divine Disruption of “Community”
- **The Abrahamic Covenant – Genesis 22:17-18** *I will surely bless you, and I will surely multiply your offspring as the stars of heaven and as the sand that is on the seashore. And your offspring shall possess the gate of his enemies, 18 and in your offspring shall all the nations of the earth be blessed, because you have obeyed my voice.*
 - **Galatians 3:16** *Now the promises were made to Abraham and to his offspring. It does not say, “And to offsprings,” referring to many, but referring to one, “And to your offspring,” who is Christ.*
- **The Israel in the OT** – Israel was to live and worship God in such a way to reflect His glory to the nations, so that they might see and come to know the True and Only God.
(Think of Rahab & Ruth – Matt. 1:5-6, Elijah and the widow of Zarephath & Naaman – Luke 4:24-27)

How did God Reveal the Purpose of Community and What Does It Look Like?

- **The Prophets** – Micah 4:2 Many nations will come and say, "Come and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD And to the house of the God of Jacob, That He may teach us about His ways And that we may walk in His paths " For from Zion will go forth the law, Even the word of the LORD from Jerusalem.
- **Jesus Earthly Ministry – Teaching & Healing of Gentiles**
 - Samaritan Woman at the well (John 4:1-45)
 - Roman Centurion (Luke 7:1-10)
 - Syrophoenician woman (Matt. 15:21-28; Mark 7:24-30)

How did God Reveal the Purpose of Community and What Does It Look Like?

The NT Great Commission – Matthew 28:16-20 *Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them. 17 And when they saw him they worshiped him, but some doubted. 18 And Jesus came and said to them, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. 19 Go therefore and make disciples of all nations (ἔθνη – people groups), baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, 20 teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”*

The Conclusion – The Consummation of Union with Christ

- **Revelation 5:8-10 & Revelation 7:9-12** *After this I looked, and behold, a great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, with palm branches in their hands, 10 and crying out with a loud voice, “Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!”*

Community Necessitates UNITY

- **John 17:11; 20-24** *Holy Father, keep them in your name, which you have given me, that they may be one, even as we are one... 20 "I do not ask for these only, but also for those who will believe in me through their word, 21 that they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me. 22 The glory that you have given me I have given to them, that they may be one even as we are one, 23 I in them and you in me, that they may become perfectly one, so that the world may know that you sent me and loved them even as you loved me. 24 Father, I desire that they also, whom you have given me, may be with me where I am, to see my glory that you have given me because you loved me before the foundation of the world.*

Why does Jesus pray for unity for His disciples and for all believers?

Community Necessitates UNITY

(John 17)

Jesus prays for unity for His disciples and for all believers:

- To show forth to a watching world the person and work of Christ – the glory of God.
- Christ is from God, loved by God, and that all His children are loved by God and brought into “unity” with Christ.

Community Necessitates UNITY

If Jesus is praying for us in this way, that means we need it. He knows our weaknesses.

Peter reminds Christians the purpose of our Unity in Christ

- **1 Peter 2:9-10** *But you are a chosen race (a specific people group), a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. 10 Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.*

But, how does that chapter begin?

- **1 Peter 2:1** *So put away all malice and all deceit and hypocrisy and envy and all slander. 2 Like newborn infants, long for the pure spiritual milk, that by it you may grow up into salvation— 3 if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is good.*

Other Verses calling us to live in community in unity

- 1 Corinthians 1:10 / 1 John 1:7 / Romans 12:3-6; 16; 15:5-67 / Philippians 2:5-11 / 1 Thessalonians 4:9-10

DIVERSITY in Unity in Christian Community – Part of God's Plan



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Introduction Survey Questions on Diversity

1. How many of you have fellowshiped in a local church body in the USA where you were the minority for over 3 months? What was your experience like?
2. How many of you have fellowshiped in a local church body outside the USA where you were the minority for over 3 months? What was your experience like?
3. How many of you have basically always fellowshiped in a local church body that you shared the same ethnic and socio-economic status?

DIVERSITY in Unity in Christian Community – A Challenge

When we talk about unity in the Church in the USA – we often think of racial unity and this can cause some confusion because what comes to mind is mostly related to skin color – how someone looks. (black vs white) With such comes historic prejudices that still saturate our culture. [*give teaching example]

The term “race” can be unhelpful for many reason in the Western context.

- This is not the way the Bible talks about different people groups.
 - When see in English “race” in OT, the Hebrew word *zera*, which is most often translated “seed” or “offspring.”
 - When you in English “race” in NT, it is most often the Greek word γένος (*genos*) – better translated as chosen people or specific people group.
- There is no solid scientific basis for the concept of race

The more biblical and better term is [ἔθνη – people group](#). Ethnicity is usually used to stress the cultural rather than the physical aspects of group identity. Ethnic groups share language, dress, food, customs, values, and sometimes religion.

SO WHAT IS THE POINT?

- When we think in these terms – it can help us use more biblical terms and realize that the challenge of DIVERSITY within Christian Community is not a MODERN DAY challenge.

How did the apostles handle ethnic diversity in the early church after Pentecost?

The Hellenist Widows & Appointment of First “Deacons” – Acts 6:1-6

- **Key Observations from the Text**
 - Trusted the Hellenist Christians to choose men to solve this issue
 - Men who were chosen were Hellenist – so they knew how to relate to the issue
 - These men were filled with Spirit and with godly character

Paul Confronts Peter’s Hypocrisy – Galatians 2:11-14

- **Key Observation from Paul**
 - Paul Reminds Us of the Reality of Redemption – To Remind us of our Unity in Christ and our unity with one another.
 - **Galatians 3:25-28** *But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a guardian, 26 for in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith. 27 For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. 28 There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.*

APPLICATION: SO WHAT ABOUT TODAY?

Thought-Provoking Questions Pertaining to Diversity in Christian Community Today

1. Why do you think many local church bodies are not very diverse? Is this a good or bad thing?
2. What challenges do we specifically have being located here in Dayton, OH?
3. What challenges do we have because of who we are demographically and ethnically?
4. How can our church encourage in a healthy way ethnic diversity within our Christian fellowship?
5. As an individual, what kinds of things can you do to have fellowship with Christians that are not just like you?

How does Christian Community happen on a practical level?

Remember & Obey The Great Commandment – daily, in every circumstance that God brings your way – proximity & ability ...

- **Matthew 22:27** *“You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. 38 This is the great and first commandment. 39 And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. 40 On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets.”*

Live out the reality of unity you have in Christ – daily relying on the Holy Spirit, knowing that this is part of your sanctification – it is a work you participate in.

- **Ephesian 4:1-7** *I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, 2 with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, 3 eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. 4 There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call— 5 one Lord, one faith, one baptism, 6 one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all. 7 But grace was given to each one of us according to the measure of Christ's gift.*

Resources for Further Study

- Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Life Together* (Harper & Row Publishers, 1954).
- “Racial Harmony and the Glory of God”, Bethlehem Institute Online Course <https://courses.biblemesh.com/bethlehem/racial-harmony-glory-of-god>
- Shai Linne, “The Gospel and Ethnic Unity” (The Gospel Coalition Conference, April 2, 2019) https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/conference_media/gospel-ethnic-unity/
- Thabiti Anyabwile, “[Bearing the Image: Identity, the Work of Christ, and the Church](#),” an online conference message at the Together for the Gospel (t4g.org/) website.
- Robert J. Priest and Alvaro L. Nieves, *This Side of Heaven: Race, Ethnicity, and the Christian Faith* (Oxford University Press, 2007) <https://epdf.tips/this-side-of-heaven-race-ethnicity-and-christian-faith.html>
- John Piper, “[Class, Culture, and Ethnic Identity in Christ](#),” an online sermon at the Desiring God website
- <https://www.desiringgod.org/messages/class-culture-and-ethnic-identity-in-christ>
- John Piper, “We Need Each Other – Christian Fellowship as a Means of Perseverance” (Desiring God Website, April 2017) <https://www.desiringgod.org/messages/we-need-each-other>